DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 990 CS 200 240

AUTHOR	Donelson, Kenneth, Ed.
TITLE	The Students' Right to Read. 1972 Edition.
INSTITUTION	National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
PUB DATE	72
NOTE	26p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Ill. 61801 (Stock No. 20809, $0.35 non-member, $0.30 member)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Freedom; Administrative Personnel; Books; *Censorship; Citizenship; Civil Liberties; *English; Librarians; Library Material Selection; *Literature; Moral Issues; Periodicals; Public Opinion; *Secondary School Students; Secondary School Teachers; *Student Rights

ABSTRACT

This statement of the NCTE is addressed to the problem of censorship in the public schools, especially censorship in the form of pressure to restrict or deny students access to books or periodicals deemed objectionable by some individual or group on moral, political, religious, ethnic, racial, or philosophical grounds. It is felt that any work is potentially open to attack by someone for some reason and that censorship is often arbitrary and irrational. One part of this statement, "The Right to Read," is an open letter to all citizens providing a rationale against censorship, discussing why censorship is a threat to education, and what the community's responsibilities are in supporting free inquiry. Another section, "A Program of Action," addressed to teachers of English, librarians, and school administrators, discusses procedures for book selection, some of the legal problems of censorship, and how to defend books against complaints or requests for censorship. A selected bibliography is included. (Author/DI)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIG
INATING IT POINTS OF VIEW OR OPIN
IONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY
REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDU
CATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 04819

The Student's Right to Read

National Council of Teachers of English

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
National Council of Teachers of English
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

NCTE COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS Robert F. Hogan, NCTE Executive Secretary, Chairman/Blyden Jackson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/Robert E. Palazzi, Burlingame High School, Burlingame, California/Bette J. Peltola, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee/Paul O'Dea, NCTE Director of Publications/**EDITORIAL SERVICES** Linda Jeanne Reed, NCTE Headquarters/**BOOK DESIGN** Kirk George Panikis, NCTE Headquarters

NCTE Stock Number 20809
Copyright c 1972. All Rights Reserved
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801
Printed in the United States of America

ED 068990

The Students' Right to Read

1972 Edition

Kenneth L. Donelson

The Right to Read and the Teacher of English

For many years, there has been pressure on American schools to restrict or deny students access to books or periodicals deemed objectionable by some individual or group on moral, political, religious, ethnic, racial, or philosophical grounds. These pressures continue today, and English teachers have no reason to believe they will diminish. The fight against censorship is a continuing series of skirmishes, not a pitched battle leading to a final victory over censorship.

We can safely make two statements about censorship: first, any work is potentially open to attack by someone, somewhere, sometime, for some reason; second, censorship is often arbitrary and irrational. For example, classics traditionally used in English classrooms have been accused of containing obscene, heretical, or subversive elements. What English teacher could anticipate judgments such as the following—judgments characteristic of those made by many would-be censors:

Plato's *Republic:* "This book is un-Christian."
George Eliot's *Silas Marner:* "You can't prove what that dirty old man is doing with that child between chapters."
Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days:* "Very unfavorable to Mormons."
Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter:* "A filthy book."
Shakespeare's *Macbeth:* "Too violent for children today."
Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment:* "Serves as a poor model for young people."
Herman Melville's *Moby Dick:* "Contains homosexuality."

Modern works, even more than the classics, are criticized as "filthy," "un-American," "overly real-

istic," and "anti-war." Some books have been attacked merely for being "controversial," suggesting that for some people the purpose of education is not the investigation of ideas but rather the indoctrination of certain set beliefs and standards. The following statements represent complaints typical of those made against modern works of literature:

J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye:* "A dreadful dreary recital of sickness, sordidness, and sadism." (Without much question, Salinger's book has been for some time the most widely censored book in the United States.)

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five:* "Its repetitious obscenity and immorality merely degrade and defile, teaching nothing."

Edward Albee's *Zoo Story:* "Pure filth."

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird:* "The word *rape* is used several times. Children should not see this in any literature book."

Some groups and individuals have also raised objections to literature written specifically for young people. As long as novels intended for young people stayed at the intellectual and emotional level of *A Date for Marcy* or *A Touchdown for Thunderbird High,* censors could forego criticism. But many contemporary novels for adolescents focus on the real world of young people—drugs, premarital sex, alcoholism, divorce, Vietnam, high school gangs, school dropouts, racism, protest movements, violence, and sensuality. English teachers willing to defend the classics and modern literature must be prepared to give equally spirited defense to serious and worthwhile adolescent books when allegations such as the following are made:

Susan Hinton's *The Outsiders:* "A glorification of violence and gangs."

Ann Head's *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones:* "Teenagers are too young to learn about pregnancy."

Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender:* "Pro-black, and boxing is a foul racket to talk about with young people."

Nat Hentoff's *I'm Really Dragged But Nothing Gets Me Down:* "Vietnam is too controversial for any classroom, and the novel is anti-American."

Literature about ethnic or racial minorities is, and is likely to remain, "controversial" or "objectionable" to many adults. As long as groups such as blacks, Indians, orientals, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans "kept their proper place"—awarded them by an Anglo society—censors rarely raised their voices. But attacks have increased in frequency as minority groups have refused to observe their assigned "place." Though nominally the criticisms of racial or ethnic literature have usually been directed at "bad language," "suggestive situations," "questionable literary merit," or "ungrammatical English" (usually oblique complaints about the *different* dialect or culture of a group), the underlying motive for some attacks has unquestionably been racial. Typical of censors' criticisms of ethnic works are the following comments:

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man:* "The book is biased on the black question."

Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl:* "Obscene and blasphemous."

Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice:* "Totally objectionable and without any literary value."

Warren Miller's *The Cool World:* "Why do kids have to read dirty books like that?"

Books are not alone in being subject to censorship. Magazines or newspapers used, recommended, or referred to in English classes have increasingly drawn the censor's fire. Few librarians would regard their periodical collections as worthwhile or representative without some or all of the following publications, but all of them have been the target of censors on occasion:

Life: "Filth, offensive and obscene, racy, risque, leering matter."

Read Magazine: "Objectionable, un-American, filthy, subversive."

National Geographic: "Nudity and sensationalism, especially in stories on barbaric foreign people."

Scholastic Magazine: "Doctrines opposing the beliefs of the majority, socialistic programs; promotes racial unrest and contains very detailed geography of foreign countries, especially those inhabited by dark people."

National Observer: "Right-wing trash with badly reported news."

New York Times: "That thing should be outlawed after printing the Pentagon papers and helping our country's enemies."

The immediate results of demands to censor books or periodicals vary. At times, school boards and administrators have supported and defended their teachers, their use of materials under fire, and the student's right of access to the materials. At other times, however, special committees have been formed to cull out "objectionable works" or "modern trash" or "controversial literature." Some teachers have been summarily reprimanded for assigning certain works, even to mature students. Others have been able to retain their positions only after initiating court action.

Not as sensational, but perhaps more important, are the long range results. Schools have removed from libraries and classrooms and English teachers have avoided using or recommending works which might make members of the community angry. Many students are consequently "educated" in a school atmosphere hostile to free inquiry. Dedicated and able students considering teaching English as a career must find little encouragement in this restrictive educational climate.

The problem of censorship does not derive solely from the small anti-intellectual, ultra-moral, or ultra-patriotic groups which will always function in a society that guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The present concern is rather with the frequency and force of attacks by others, often people of good will and the best intentions, some from within the teaching profession. The National Council of Teachers of English, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Library Association, as well as the publishing industry and writers themselves, agree: pressures for censorship are great throughout our society.

The material that follows is divided into two sections. The first on "The Right to Read" is addressed to parents and the community at large. Separately printed by NCTE, it may be obtained in quantity for distribution. In the last section, "A Course for Action," are Council recommendations for establishing professional committees in every school to set up procedures for book selection, to work for community support, and to review complaints against any book or periodical.*

*Permission is granted to reproduce in whole or in part either or both sections, with proper credit to the National Council of Teachers of English. Because of specific local problems, some schools may wish to modify the statements and arrange separately for printing or duplication. In such cases, of course, it should be made clear that revised statements appear under the authorization and sponsorship of the local school or association, not NCTE.

An open letter to the citizens of our country from the National Council of Teachers of English:

THE RIGHT TO READ

"The worthy fruit of an academic culture is an open mind. . . ."

Charles W. Eliot, "First Inaugural Address," Harvard University, October 19, 1869.

". . . education should prepare people not just to earn a living but to live a life—a creative, humane, and sensitive life. This means that the schools must provide a liberal, humanizing education. And the purpose of liberal education must be, and indeed always has been, to educate educators—to turn out men and women who are capable of educating their families, their friends, their communities, and most importantly, themselves . . . .Of what does the capacity to educate oneself consist? It means that a person has both the desire and the capacity to learn for himself, to dig out what he needs to know, as well as the capacity to judge what is worth learning. It means, too, that one can think for himself, so that he is dependent on neither the opinions nor the facts of others, and that he uses that capacity to think about his own education, which means to think about his own nature and his place in the universe—about the meaning of life and of knowledge and of the relations between them."

Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education,* 1970.

"The writer of fiction, if he is serious and conscientious, strives to re-create and illuminate experience. It is not his right to falsify. He has to be honest to his materials. He has to be honest to himself. He operates in the conviction that if anything is important it is truth as he has been led to see it."

A. B. Guthrie, Jr., "The Peter Rabbit Library?" *Nieman Reports,* April 1958.

"Where suspicion fills the air and holds scholars in line for fear of their jobs, there can be no exercise of the free intellect. . . . A problem can no longer be pursued with impunity to its edges. Fear stalks the classroom. The teacher is no longer a stimulant to adventurous thinking; she becomes instead a pipe line for safe and sound information. A deadening dogma takes the place of free inquiry. instruction tends to

become sterile; pursuit of knowledge is discouraged; discussion often leaves off where it should begin."

Justice William O. Douglas, United States Supreme Court: Adler v. Board of Education, 1952.

The right to read, like all rights guaranteed or implied within our constitutional tradition, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways, education is an effort to improve the quality of choices open to man. But to deny the freedom of choice in fear that it may be unwisely used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts of individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

The right of any individual not just to read but to read whatever he wants to read is basic to a democratic society. This right is based on an assumption that the educated and reading man possesses judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of his own actions. In effect, the reading man is freed from the bonds of discovering all things and all facts and all truths through his own direct experiences, for his reading allows him to meet people, debate philosophies, and experience events far beyond the narrow confines of his own existence.

In selecting books for reading by young people, English teachers consider the contribution which each work may make to the education of the reader, its aesthetic value, its honesty, its readability for a particular group of students, and its appeal to adolescents. English teachers, however, may use different works for different purposes. The criteria for choosing a work to be read by an entire class are somewhat different from the criteria for choosing works to be read by small groups. For example, a teacher might select John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* for reading by an entire class, partly because the book has received wide critical recognition, partly because it is relatively short and will keep the attention of many slow readers, and partly because it has proved popular with many students of widely differing abilities. The same teacher, faced with the responsibility of choosing or recommending books for several small groups of students, might select or recommend books as different as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Den-*

isovitch, Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, or Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, depending upon the abilities and interests of the students in each group. And the criteria for suggesting books to individuals or for recommending something worth reading for a student who casually stops by after class are different from selecting material for a class or group. But the teacher selects books; he does not censor them. Selection implies that a teacher is free to choose this or that work, depending upon the purpose to be achieved and the student or class in question, but a book selected this year may be ignored next year, and the reverse. Censorship implies that certain works are not open to selection, this year or any year.

Many works contain isolated elements to which some individuals or groups may object. The literary artist seeks truth, as he is able to see and feel it. As a seeker of truth, he must necessarily challenge at times the common beliefs or values of a society; he must analyze and comment on people's actions and values and the frequent discrepancy between what they purport to live by and what they do live by. In seeking to discover meaning behind reality, the artist strives to achieve a work which is honest. Moreover, the value and impact of any literary work must be examined as a whole and not in part—the impact of the entire work being more important than the words, phrases, or incidents out of which it is made.

Wallace Stevens once wrote, "Literature is the better part of life. To this it seems inevitably necessary to add, provided life is the better part of literature." Students and parents have the right to demand that education today keep students in touch with the reality of the world outside the classroom. Much of classic literature asks questions as valid and significant today as when the literature first appeared, questions like "What is the nature of humanity?" "Why do people praise individuality and practice conformity?" "What do people need for a good life?" and "What is the nature of the good person?" But youth is the age of revolt, and the times today show much of the world in revolt. To pretend otherwise is to ignore a reality made clear to young people and adults alike on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines. English teachers must be free to employ books, classic or contemporary, which do not lie to the young about the perilous but wondrous times we live in, books which talk of the fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations people experience, books about people not only as they are but as they can be.

English teachers forced through the pressures of censorship to use only safe or antiseptic works are placed in the morally and intellectually untenable position of lying to their students about the nature and condition of mankind.

The teacher must exercise care to select or recommend works for class reading and group discussion which will not embarrass students in discussions with their peers. One of the most important responsibilities of the English teacher is developing rapport and respect among students. Respect for the uniqueness and potential of the individual, an important facet of the study of literature, should be emphasized in the English class. For students to develop a respect for each individual, no matter what his race or creed or values may be, multi-ethnic materials must become a part of the literature program in all schools, regardless of the ethnic composition of the school population. It is time that literature classes reflect the cultural contributions of many minority groups in the United States, just as they should acquaint students with contributions from the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

What a young reader gets from any book depends both on the selection and on the reader himself. A teacher should choose books with an awareness of the student's interests, his reading ability, his mental and emotional maturity, and the values he may derive from the reading. A wide knowledge of many works, common sense, and professional dedication to students and to literature will guide the teacher in making his selections. The community that entrusts students to the care of an English teacher should also trust that teacher to exercise professional judgment in selecting or recommending books.

The Threat to Education

Censorship leaves students with an inadequate and distorted picture of the ideals, values, and problems of their culture. Writers may often be the spokesmen of their culture, or they may stand to the side attempting to describe and evaluate that culture. Yet, partly because of censorship or the fear of censorship, many writers are ignored or inadequately represented in the public schools, and many are represented in anthologies not by their best work but by their "safest" or "least offensive" work.

The censorship pressures receiving the greatest publicity are those of small groups who protest the use of a limited number of books with some "objectionable" realistic elements, such as *Brave New*

World, Lord of the Flies, Catcher in the Rye, The Stranger, Johnny Got His Gun, The Assistant, Catch-22, Soul on Ice, or *Stranger in a Strange Land.* The most obvious and immediate victims are often found among our best and most creative English teachers, those who have ventured outside the narrow boundaries of conventional texts. Ultimately, however, the real victims are the students, denied the freedom to explore ideas and pursue truth wherever and however they wish.

Great damage may be done by book committees appointed by national or local organizations to pore over anthologies, texts, library books, and paperbacks to find sentences which advocate, or seem to advocate, causes or concepts or practices these organizations condemn. As a result, some publishers, sensitive to possible objections, carefully exclude sentences or selections that might conceivably offend some group, somehow, sometime, somewhere.

Many well-meaning people wish to restrict reading materials in schools to books that do not mention certain aspects of life they find offensive: drugs, profanity, Black Power, anti-war marches, smoking, sex, racial unrest, rock music, politics, pregnancy, school dropouts, peace rallies, drinking, Chicano protests, or divorce. Although he may personally abhor one or more of these facets of modern life, the English teacher has the responsibility to encourage students to read about and reflect on many aspects, good and bad, of their own society and of other cultures.

The English Teacher's Purposes and Responsibilities

The purpose of education remains what it has always been in a free society: to develop a free and reasoning human being who can think for himself, who understands his own and, to some extent, other cultures, who lives compassionately and cooperatively with his fellow man, who respects both himself and others, who has developed self-discipline and self-motivation and exercises both, who can laugh at a world which often seems mad, and who can successfully develop survival strategies for existence in that world.

The English teacher knows that literature is a significant part of the education of man, for literature raises problems and questions and dilemmas that have perplexed and intrigued and frustrated man since the dawn of time. Literature presents some solutions to complex problems and some answers to abiding

questions, perhaps incomplete but the best we have found. Even more important, literature continues to raise questions man can never wholly answer: What is the relationship between power and moral responsibility? Why does the good man sometimes suffer and the evil man sometimes go untouched by adversity? How can man reconcile the conflict of duty between what he owes society and what he owes his own conscience? The continued search for answers, tentative as they must prove, is a necessary part of the educated man's life, and the search for answers may in part be found through reading.

Aware of the vital role of literature in the education of mankind, the English teacher has unique responsibilities to his students and to adults in the community. To his students, he is responsible for knowing many books from many cultures, for demonstrating a personal commitment to the search for truth through wide reading and continual critical questioning of his own values and beliefs, for respecting the unique qualities and potential of each student, for studying many cultures and societies and their values, and for exhibiting the qualities of the educated man. To adults, he is responsible for communicating information about his literature program; for explaining, not defending, what books he uses with what students, for what reasons, and with what results; and for communicating the necessity of free inquiry and the search for truth in a democratic society and the dangers of censorship and repression.

The Community's Responsibility

American citizens who care about the improvement of education are urged to join students, teachers, librarians, administrators, boards of education, and professional and scholarly organizations in support of the students' right to read. Only widespread and informed support in every community can assure that

- enough citizens are interested in the development and maintenance of a superior school system to guarantee its achievement;
- malicious gossip, ignorant rumors, and deceptive letters to the editor will not be circulated without challenge and correction;
- newspapers will be convinced that the public sincerely desires objective school news reporting, free from slanting or editorial comment which destroys confidence in and support for schools;

the community will not permit its resources and energies to be dissipated in conflicts created by special interest groups striving to advance their ideologies or biases; and

faith in democratic traditions and processes will be maintained.

(Permission to reproduce the above statement on "The Right to Read" is hereby granted by the National Council of Teachers of English. Separately printed statements may be obtained from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801, 20 for $1.15 or $.04 each in quantities of 100 or more.)

A PROGRAM OF ACTION

Censorship in schools is a widespread problem. Teachers of English, librarians, and school administrators can best serve students, literature, and the profession today if they prepare now to face pressures sensibly, demonstrating on the one hand a willingness to consider the merits of any complaint and on the other the courage to defend their literature program with intelligence and vigor. The Council therefore recommends that every school undertake the following two-step program to protect the students' right to read:

the establishment of a committee of teachers to consider book selection procedures and to screen complaints; and

a vigorous campaign to establish a community atmosphere in which local citizens may be enlisted to support the freedom to read.

Procedures for Book Selection*

Although one may defend the freedom to read without reservation as one of the hallmarks of a free society, there is no substitute for informed, professional, and qualified book selection. The English teacher is better qualified to choose and recommend books for his classes than a person not prepared in the field. Nevertheless, the administrator has certain legal and professional responsibilities. For these reasons and as a matter of professional courtesy, he should be kept informed about the criteria and the procedures used by English teachers in selecting books and the titles of the books used.

In each school the English department should develop its own statement explaining why literature is taught and how books are chosen for each class. This statement should be on file with the administration before any complaints are received.

Operating within such a policy, the English department should take the following steps:

*Note: The principal concern here is for books to be used in English classes. The more general problem of selecting materials for school libraries has already been under study by many national groups. Much useful information on this broader question is available from the American Library Association. (See appendix, p. 20)

Establish a committee to help other English teachers find exciting and challenging books of potential value to students in a specific school. Schools without departments or small schools with a few English teachers should organize a permanent committee charged with the responsibility of alerting other teachers to new books just published or old books now forgotten which might prove valuable in the literature program.

Devote time at each department meeting to reviews and comments by the above committee or plan special meetings for this purpose. Free and open meetings to discuss books of potential value to students would seem both reasonable and normal for any English department. Teachers should be encouraged to challenge any books recommended or to suggest titles hitherto ignored. Require that each English teacher give a rationale for any book to be read by an entire class. The rationale, oral or written, might compel the teacher to look at the work anew and explore the problems involved in teaching it. Each teacher should explain why he chose the book for a particular class and what his objectives are with regard to the specific problems, needs, and interests of that class. He should also identify any problems in the theme, tone, stance, or style of the book and how he will handle them, any possible censorship problems inherent in the book and how he will answer the censor, and the teaching approaches that will best serve the interests of literature, the book, and his students. Written rationales for all books read by an entire class would serve the department well if censorship should strike. A file of rationales should serve as impressive evidence to the administration and the community that English teachers have not chosen their books lightly or haphazardly.

Report to the administration the books that will be used for class reading by each English teacher.

Such a procedure gives each teacher the right to expect support from fellow teachers and administrators whenever someone objects to a book.

The Legal Problem

Apart from the professional and moral issues involved in censorship, there are legal matters about which NCTE cannot give advice. The Council is not a legal authority. Across the nation, moreover, conditions vary so much that no one general principle

applies. In some states, for example, textbooks are purchased from public funds and supplied free to students; in others, students must rent or buy their own texts.

The legal status of textbook adoption lists also varies. Some lists include only those books which must be taught and allow teachers freedom to select additional titles; other lists are restrictive, containing the only books which may be required for all students.

As a part of sensible preparations for handling attacks on books, each school should ascertain what laws apply to it.

Preparing the Community

To respond to complaints about books, every school should have a committee of teachers (and possibly students, parents, and other representatives from the community) organized to

inform the community about book selection procedures;

enlist the support of citizens, possibly by explaining the place of literature in the educational process or by discussing at meetings of parents and other community groups the books used at that school; and

consider any complaints against any work.

No community is so small that it lacks concerned people who care about their children and the educational program of the schools. No community is so small that it lacks readers who will support the English teachers in defending books when complaints are received. Unhappily, English teachers too often fail to seek out these people and to cultivate their good will and support before censorship strikes.

Defending the Books

Despite the care taken to select worthwhile books for student reading and the qualifications of teachers selecting and recommending books, occasional objections to a work will undoubtedly be made. All books are potentially open to criticism in one or more general areas: the treatment of ideologies, of minorities, of love and sex; the use of language not acceptable to some people; the type of illustrations; the private life or political affiliations of the author or, in a few cases, the illustrator.

If some attacks are made by groups or individuals frankly hostile to free inquiry and open discussion, others are made by misinformed or misguided people

who, acting on emotion or rumor, simply do not understand how the books are to be used. Others are made by well-intentioned and conscientious people who fear that harm will come to some segment of the community if a particular book is read or recommended.

Occasionally, teachers lacking judgment or inadequately prepared to teach literature select books badly. Complaints in such cases may indeed be reasonable. The committee reviewing complaints should read each objection carefully, in no case automatically or blindly defending either teachers or books without some inquiry. Parents and the community are likely to be initially suspicious of this committee, confident that its duties consist of delaying objections until interest has waned, thereby whitewashing all teachers and all books. If parents and the community are expected to take the committee seriously, the English department would be well-advised to take the committee's responsibilities and actions seriously.

While complaints sometimes come by letter, more often they first are communicated via a telephone call to an administrator, sometimes to the department chairman, less often to the teacher involved. The complainant sometimes remains anonymous, often representing no one but himself, but in too many schools he is still able to stir up a whirlwind of misunderstanding and trouble. Unhappily, the results are too often the same whether or not he has a defensible complaint: the objector is placated, teacher morale is undermined, and a book which might have helped a student understand his world disappears from the English curriculum.

Too many schools have capitulated to threats of vague community sanctions and to references to the backing of powerful forces. As a result, without due process, without a specific charge, without a signed complaint, without the testimony of all interested parties, administrators deny students the right to read. The many parents who want their children to have a broad education are victims of the few who do not.

What should be done upon receipt of a complaint?

If the complainant telephones, listen courteously and refer him to the teacher involved. That teacher should be the first person to discuss the book with the person objecting to its use.

If the complainant is not satisfied, invite him to file his complaint in writing, but make no commitments, admissions of guilt, or threats. Indicate that

a form for the complaint will be sent to him.

If the complainant writes, contact the teacher involved and let that teacher call the complainant. Sometimes the problem seems less serious and more easily resolved through personal contact over the phone. If the complainant is not satisfied, invite him to file his complaint in writing on a form to be sent to him. (See sample.)

At first, except for politely acknowledging the complaint and explaining the established procedures, the English teacher should do nothing. The success of much censorship depends upon frightening an unprepared school or English department into some precipitous action. A standardized procedure will take the sting from the first outburst of criticism. When the responsible objector learns that he will be given a fair hearing through following the proper channels, he is more likely to be satisfied. The idle censor, on the other hand, may well be discouraged from taking further action. A number of advantages will be provided by the form, which will

formalize the complaint,

indicate specifically the work in question,

identify the complainant,

suggest the size of his backing,

require the complainant to think through his objections in order to make an intelligent statement on the work (1, 2, and 3),

cause him to evaluate the work for other groups than merely the one he first had in mind (4),

establish his familiarity with the work (5),

give him an opportunity to consider the criticism about the work and the teacher's purpose in using the work (6, 7, and 8), and

give him an opportunity to suggest alternative actions to be taken on the work (9 and 10).

The committee reviewing complaints should be available on short notice to consider the completed "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work" and to call in the complainant and the teacher involved for a conference. Members of the committee should have reevaluated the work in advance of the meeting, and the group should be prepared to explain its findings. Membership of the committee should ordinarily include an administrator, the English department chairman, and at least two classroom teachers of English. But the department might con-

Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Work

Author_____ Hardcover___ Paperback___

Title_____

Publisher (if known)_____

Request initiated by_____

Telephone_____ Address_____

City_____ Zip code_____

Complainant represents

___himself

___(name organization)_____

___(identify other group)_____

1. To what in the work do you object? Please be specific; cite pages._____

2. What of value is there in this work?_____

3. What do you feel might be the result of reading this work?_____

4. For what age group would you recommend this work?_____

5. Did you read the entire work?____What pages or sections?_____

6. Are you aware of the judgment of this work by critics?_____

7. Are you aware of the teacher's purpose in using this work?_____

8. What do you believe is the theme or purpose of this work?_____

9. What would you prefer the school do about this work?

___Do not assign or recommend it to my child.

___Withdraw it from all students.

___Send it back to the English department for reevaluation.

10. In its place, what work of equal value would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of a society or a set of values?_____

_____
(Signature of Complainant)

sider the advisability of including members from the community and the local or state NCTE affiliate. As a matter of course, recommendations from the committee would be forwarded to the superintendent, who would in turn submit them to the board of education, the legally constituted authority in the school.

Teachers and administrators should recognize that the responsibility for selecting works for class study lies with classroom teachers and that the responsibility for reevaluating any work begins with the review committee. Both teachers and administrators should refrain from discussing the objection with the complainant, the press, or community groups. Once the complaint has been filed, the authority for handling the situation must ultimately rest with the administration and school board.

Freedom of inquiry is essential to education in a democracy. To establish conditions essential for freedom, teachers and administrators need to follow procedures similar to those recommended here. Where schools resist unreasonable pressures, the cases are seldom publicized and students continue to read works as they wish. The English teacher can be free to teach literature, and students can be free to read whatever they wish only if informed and vigilant groups, within the profession and without, unite in resisting unfair pressures.

APPENDIX

(Revised, September 1972)

Special materials to assist teachers and administrators are available from the following organizations:

National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

The Students' Right to Read. Additional copies of this statement: $.35 each, 5 for $1.00, $.15 each in quantities of 10 or more.

"The Open Letter" taken from *The Students' Right to Read.* A statement for the public reprinted from pages 6-12 of this report: 20 for $1.15, $.04 each in quantities of 100 or more.

Censorship. Twelve articles reprinted from *The Leaflet* of the New England Association of Teachers of English. 1969. $1.00.

Censorship and the English Teacher. A collection of articles reprinted from *Arizona English Bulletin.* 1969. $1.25; 15 or more, $1.15 each.

Censorship and the Values of Fiction. Reprinted from *English Journal,* March 1964. 10 for $2.00.

How Censorship Affects the School. Reprinted from *Wisconsin English Journal.* 1963. $.35.

Meeting Censorship in the School: A Series of Case Studies. 1967. $1.20.

Obscenity, the Law, and the English Teacher. Papers presented to an NDEA Institute for Advanced Study in English. 1966. $1.50.

American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Advisory Statement Concerning Restricted Circulation of Library Materials. Approved by the Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 20, 1971, as an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.

Advisory Statement on Reevaluating Library Collections. Adopted by the Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 28, 1972.

Advisory Statement on Sexism, Racism, and Other "isms" in Library Materials. Adopted by the Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 25, 1972.

Free Access to Libraries for Minors. Approved by the ALA Council, June 30, 1972.

Freedom to Read Statement. Prepared by the Westchester Conference of ALA and the American Book Publishers Council, May 25, 1953. Revised January 28, 1972.

How Libraries Can Resist Censorship. Adopted by the ALA Council, February 1, 1962. Revised January 28, 1972.

Library Bill of Rights. Adopted June 18, 1948, by the ALA Council. Amended February 2, 1961, and June 27, 1967.

Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom. A bi-monthly publication available by subscription. $5.00 per year.

Policy on Confidentiality of Library Records. Adopted by the ALA Council, January 20, 1971.

Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials. Approved by the American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors at the Mid-Winter Conference of the ALA, 1970.

Resolution on Challenged Materials. Adopted June 25, 1971, by the ALA Council.

School Library Bill of Rights for School Library Media Center Programs. Approved by the AASL Board of Directors, June 1969.

Statement on Labeling. Adopted July 13, 1951, by the ALA Council. Revised June 25, 1971.

"What to Do Before the Censor Comes and After." Reprint from the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom,* March 1972.

Association of American Publishers, 1 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

Freedom-to-Read Bulletin. Several issues are published annually.

Additional advice and information may be obtained from the following organizations:

American Civil Liberties Union, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010

Freedom of Information Center, Box 858, Columbia, Missouri 65201; or 328 Pennsylvania Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20003

National Education Association, Commission on Professional Rights and Responsibilities, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

National School Boards Association, Inc., 1233 Central Street, Evanston, Illinois 60201

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Article I of the *Constitution.*

"They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." Benjamin Franklin, *Historical Review of Pennsylvania.*

"... students are seldom encouraged to analyze their own values and those of their teachers and peers. Millions pass through the education system without once having been forced to search out the contradictions in their own value systems, to probe their own life goals deeply, or even to discuss these matters candidly with adults and peers." Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock.*

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." *John,* viii, 32.

"Censorship is stupid and repugnant for two empirical reasons: censors are men no better than ourselves, their judgments no less fallible or open to dishonesty. Secondly, the thing won't work; those who really want to get hold of a book will do so somehow." George Steiner, *Language and Silence.*

"Liberty is the only thing you cannot have unless you are willing to give it to others." William Allen White, editorial in *Emporia* (Kansas) *Gazette,* October 24, 1940.

"Life itself is often shocking, beset with temptation, surrounded with sordidness.... Frightened ignorance is no good preparation to meet these. But a youngster who has been prepared for these shocks with honesty will have little to fear from his encounter with the pages of any books." Dan Lacy, *Time,* May 16, 1960.

"I deny the right of the people to exercise such coercion (censorship) either by themselves or by their government. The power itself is illegitimate. The best government has no more title to it than the worst. It is as noxious, or more noxious, when exerted in accordance with public opinion, than when in opposition to it. If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the

power, would be justified in silencing mankind." John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*.

"Freedom is not divisible into political expression and literary expression. The lock on the door of the legislature, the parliament or the assembly hall, by order of the king, the commissar, or the fuehrer, has historically been followed or preceded by a lock on the door of the printer's, the publisher's, or the bookseller's." Senator John F. Kennedy, National Book Award Ceremony, 1956.

"There should be good, vigorous outspoken books in our school libraries, dirty words and all, sex scenes and all, and school people should work hard to get the kind of support which says, the material is here for those who want it. Others can leave it alone. But under no circumstances can a minority decide for all. The position is reasonable and defensible, and if teachers will make clear that this is where they stand the results cannot help being good. But systematic exclusion of the controversial book only prolongs the agony of waiting for social change." Ervin J. Gaines, "Censorship and What to Do about It," *Minnesota English Journal*, Winter 1969.

"I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, nor without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is by triall and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excremental whitenesse." John Milton, *Areopagitica*.

"Teen-agers know a lot today. Not just things out of a textbook, but about living. They know their parents aren't superhuman, they know that justice doesn't always win out, and that sometimes the bad guys win. . . . Writers needn't be afraid that they will shock their teen-age audience. But give them something to hang onto. Show that some people don't sell out, and that everyone can't be bought. Do it realistically. Earn respect by giving it." Susan Hinton, author of *The Outsiders*, in the *New York Times Book Review*, August 27, 1967.